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# Spectrum

The Magazine for Columbia and Montour counties

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About the cover: Sunbury North Shore Line runs the Fall Foliage Excursion Train annually from Sunbury to Bloomsburg.  
*Photo by Ronald Kouf II*



# BEHIND THE LINES

For more than three months, MaryJayne Reibsome, a journalism student at Bloomsburg University, has been consumed by the crash of TWA Flight 800 in July 1996.

We assigned her as editor and designer for our exclusive six-page section that includes an article by Donald Nibert, who questions anomalies and inconsistencies in the official investigation. She also conducted a Q&A interview with Mr. Nibert.

In this section are exclusive photographs of both sides of the plane as well as the memorial in Montoursville.

Also in the magazine are in-depth articles that bring to life some of the rich history of the area. First, take a look inside the underground tunnels of Columbia

County, then emerge to window shop for Christmas trees at tree farms in Columbia and Montour counties. Climb aboard for a ride with train-chasers, then come home for some hearth cooking of roast duck, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie. We also invite you to enter one of the oldest and most historical houses in Bloomsburg.

Finally, leave the comforts of a quiet and safe home and visit one where supernatural phenomena frightened a young woman and led to a religious exorcism. This article encompasses the secrets and power of the Ouiji board.

These are the articles awaiting you inside *Spectrum* magazine. So find some free time, relax in your favorite chair, and enjoy.

~ The *Spectrum* Staff

## Spectrum Magazine

Vol. 13, Nos. 1/2 Winter 2000

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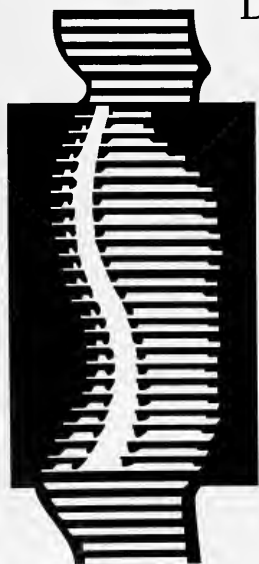
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**A**nyone who delves into the history of a place inevitably uncovers long-buried secrets. Sometimes, these obscure tales come bubbling to the surface all by themselves. Consider the story of Snyder's Run, a brook that courses through Lightstreet and flows into the Susquehanna River near Bloomsburg's Town Park. When Columbia County was first settled the creek ran above the ground like most streams in the region. But over time, farmers who owned land along Snyder's Run encroached on its flood plain, then covered it. Eventually, much of the stream ran through a closed channel. Then in 1972, Tropical Storm Agnes caused flooding that ripped the covers off the rain-swollen stream.

Sometimes, forgotten tales about a place consists of romantic oral traditions that have been handed down over the generation—but only to a handful of people. The facts can be shadowy and difficult to determine and a few people in the know may be reluctant to talk—provided those people can be found.

Other times, persistent verbal accounts yield colorful data, but records haven't been located to substantiate them. For instance, there is talk that in certain sec-

tions of Bloomsburg there once were tunnels used to mine iron ore, according to historian George A. Turner.

However, historical sources documenting these stories are scarce and little scholarly research has been done on Bloomsburg's Iron Age, said Turner, a retired Bloomsburg University history professor.

From the 1840s to the 1860s, there were a number of iron furnaces in Bloomsburg that obtained ore from nearby mines. The town's first railroad was built to serve the local iron industry, Turner said.

### **The Underground Railroad**

In Espy, an old house along Old Berwick Road may have been used to hide fugitive slaves during the Civil War. Several years ago, the homeowners were surprised to discover a hidden room nestled between the first and second floors of the house which was built around 1800. There weren't any windows and anyone staying in this crawl space could breathe fresh air by tilting a board in the exterior wall.

According to legend, an abolitionist once lived in the house during the mid-1800s. He used the secret room as a "station" on the Underground Railroad, a clandestine network of anti-slavery activists who helped slaves fleeing the South make their way into Canada and freedom. "Conductors" who brought fugitives up the Susquehanna River knew their "passengers" could find shelter and food at this "station" until they were ready to resume traveling on the "railroad."

There's little, if any, information to prove these claims. William B. Hughes, who now owns the home, said that no historians have ever come to the house with evidence to support the story. Hughes said he thinks the story was "more family folklore than historic," and that the cubbyhole is "definitely less than four feet high." Hughes hasn't located the tilting board either.

But one thing that is true is that runaway slaves did travel along the Susquehanna River and surely passed the Old Berwick Road home on their journey to Canada.

Descend into the depths to  
unravel the tales in  
the ever-darkening tunnels  
of the . . .

# **Bloomsburg Underground**

by John L. Moore

*Spectrum*

## The Campus Subway

A situation, structure, or episode doesn't need to be ancient to fade from memory. A century after the Civil War, there was an active underground at Bloomsburg State College. Its core was what the institution deemed a "subway." It was a subterranean passageway that hundreds of people, mainly students and faculty, used every day. To unearth facts about this forgotten era, it is necessary to dig into the history of the university, which began as a small academy in 1839.

Among the early buildings were Carver Hall which contained classrooms and a large auditorium and was erected in 1867. Waller Hall, doubling as a dormitory and administrative building, was dedicated in 1886, with a gymnasium later built to adjoin it. Immediately across from Waller was Noetling Hall which housed classrooms, the business education department and meeting

rooms used by campus organizations. Noetling was completed in 1886.

In her history of Bloomsburg State College, *Profile of the Past, A Living Legacy*, Edna Bessie Edwards reported that at a cost of \$750, a wooden covered bridge was built to connect the second floors of Carver and Noetling halls.

The institution, known as Bloomsburg State Teachers School, was much different then, with only 600-700 students who used "The Bridge" to leave Carver and enter Waller without venturing outside. The Bridge was glass-lined which gave students and faculty a view of the campus below as they walked. The Bridge was removed in 1939.

During the late 1950s, the campus dining hall was relocated from Waller to a new building across the street. A lot of student activity revolved around the three halls and the new building so an-

other tunnel was built onto the new dining hall.

Linda Long, of Alumni Affairs, said the tunnel was a popular thoroughfare even in fair weather. "It was real wide," she said. "You could almost drive a golf cart through it."

In 1972, a new structure, the Waller Administration Building, was built several hundred yards northwest of the nearly century-old edifice known as "Old Waller." The destruction of the Waller Hall in 1974-75 made the subway obsolete.

Bloomsburg University hasn't obliterated all traces of underground passageways on the main campus. Once, there was a subterranean network of tunnels used to service the steam lines. "Those old tunnels have been filled in," explains Dr. Robert J. Parrish, vice-president for administration. But remnants of these former tunnels can be found, if one knows where to look.

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"It reminds you of a cave," says John Pursel, a university maintenance worker. "It's cold with water dripping and no lighting. I wouldn't be surprised if there were even bats in there."

A few years ago, a new 1,000-foot tunnel, extending from the Waller Administration Building to Navy Hall, was built. The tunnel will not be used as a passageway for students and faculty but for fiber-optic cables and other wiring to service the university's computers, according to Parrish.

The concrete tunnel is split in half—one side for steel pipes that carry steam to campus buildings and the other side is a walkway for workers. As funding permits, the university plans to expand the tunnel to serve other sections of the campus.

#### The Magee Tunnel

In the late 1940s, industrialist Harry Magee built an elegant and modernistic mansion with a handsome courtyard and patio in Bloomsburg. It was featured in a photo spread in LIFE magazine in 1947. In 1988, long after Magee's death, his family donated the West Main Street building to Bloomsburg University.

Since then, an assortment of stories have circulated about the house. "People like to think this place is riddled with secret passageways and false doors, but it isn't true," says John H. Abell, associate dean of Continuing and Distance Education. Persisting rumors stated that a tunnel began at the mansion, ran under the Bloomsburg Fairgrounds, and ended at the Magee mill. Magee's son, James, says that was never the case.

There is a tunnel at Magee Center but the facts about it are hardly colorful or dramatic. Not far from the faded lines of a shuffleboard court is an abandoned tunnel that Magee used to commute from his mansion to a shop he had in a brick building across the alley. Magee drove a cart into the first floor elevator and went down to the basement, then entered the tunnel and drove to the shop where another elevator took him to the street level.

#### Subterranean Centralia

Another piece of underground lore is Centralia, a little mountaintop community tucked away at the southern tip of

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Columbia County, which is rapidly becoming a virtual ghost town.

Thick veins of anthracite coal run under the borough; some caught fire in 1962. The fire still burns despite attempts to extinguish it or prevent it from spreading into other sections of the community.

In the past 25 years, hundreds of Centralians have moved away, leaving about 25 people residing in the 15 or so remaining houses, according to Lamar Mervine, mayor since 1993. Despite the exodus, life in Centralia is rarely lonely because "everybody knows everybody," says Mervine, a life resident of Centralia.

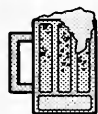
Through the years, the state government demolished most of the borough's buildings because they were considered unsafe for habitation due to the fires. The

Columbia County Redevelopment Authority condemned the remaining structures, but some people refuse to leave their homes and continue to live there in spite of the potential dangers.

Mervine, 83, worked in the mines for 13 years and almost 12 years above ground in strip mines. There are 40 million tons of coal under Centralia, according to Mervine, and he thinks government officials are forcing people to leave the borough so the government can claim the mineral rights from Centralia.

Although the borough is nearly extinct, the mayor and borough council still hold council meetings once a month.

People don't move into Centralia and the remaining residents who refuse to leave find themselves and their community becoming a tourist attraction.



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# A Growing Tradition

Christmas  
Tree Farms  
of  
Columbia  
and  
Montour  
counties

Text and photos by Elizabeth H. Smith

**A**fter a hot, dry summer, area Christmas tree farmers are prepared for the cold, and ready to open their businesses to the public. "The drought this summer had minimal effects on local Christmas tree farms and there will not be a shortage of trees or raised prices in years to come," says Jim Campbell, director of the Pennsylvania Christmas Tree Growers Association and member of Heritage Acres Evergreens. "Farmers adjust to the demand by replanting lost trees in the spring," he says.

There are almost 1,500 farms in Pennsylvania, making the state the nation's second largest producer of Christmas trees. Christmas trees have been

sold commercially in the United States since about 1850. Today, 98 percent of Christmas trees sold come from farms, and are rarely cut from forests. Christmas tree farms produce 36 million trees each year on one million acres of land, and employ about 100,000 people.

Columbia and Montour counties are home to about 80 Christmas tree farms. For many "choose and cut" farms, November is the best time for business. Families can tag their tree early, so they can come back closer to Christmas and cut it down fresh. Many "choose and cut" farms also sell wreaths, swags, and arrangements,

all made from the boughs of the lesser grade, untrimmed trees.

Burlingame's Tree Farm, Benton, is a "choose and cut" farm owned by Jack and Cathy Burlingame. They purchased the land in 1985 and established permanent residence in 1994. The Burlingames are retired and in the process of building a house on the small tree farm of about 8,000 trees. Each year, about 1,000 trees are planted, and about 300 trees are sold. "We have faced many difficulties including poor soil, deer, weeds, and insects like spider mites," says Jack Burlingame. "We are now beginning to overcome these obstacles as we gain experience." They recently put in a pond to protect newly-planted trees during droughts.

Closer to Christmas, the Burlingames put out saws, along with a can to collect money. "Our customers are very honest," says Cathy Burlingame. "We really enjoy being a small operation."

Ecology III, the family-owned, "choose and cut" farm of Ted and Nancy Jacobsen, is located on Savage Hill outside of Orangeville. The Jacobsens have been selling trees for six years. Ecology III grows about 15,000 trees and starts 1,000 - 1,500 new trees each year.

"We offer handsaws, measuring poles, and Christmas tree limos, which are wagons with netting to hold the branches in," says Ted Jacobsen. The tree limo is Ted's invention to make the job of dragging the tree easier. "After a tree is cut, it's placed on a shaker to remove loose needles, and a hole is drilled in the trunk so the tree can be mounted on a stand," says Jacobsen. The trees are baled to compress and tie the branches down, making the tree easy to transport.



*Spectrum*

Megargell Farms, Orangeville, is a "choose and cut" and wholesale farm owned by Don and Joyce Megargell. The Megargells have been operating the business for eight years and began planting 16 years ago. Their sons help maintain the trees while Joyce makes about 500 wreaths a year.

Megargell Farms grows about 70,000 trees, planting about 5,000 trees annually; about 3,000 trees are sold each year. The farm offers bailing and trunk drilling for placement of a stand. "To keep a tree fresh and healthy in the house, it is important to re-cut the trunk of the tree before placing it in the stand," says Don Megargell. "When a tree is cut, the tree's natural healing process is to coat the cut area of the trunk with sap." This is the tree's natural healing process and it will not let the tree soak up any water. "It is also important to give the tree a gallon of water every day," says Megargell. "If the stand goes dry, the tree will sap over again."

In addition to cut trees, local growers sell balled and burlapped trees (B&B) as well. B&B trees are dug up with their roots intact so they can be replanted.



### Ecology III

The root balls are wrapped in burlap and secured with a wire frame for shipping.

"Many people like B&B trees because they can be replanted after use in the house," says Don Megargell. "A balled and burlapped tree should only be in the house for a maximum of seven days, then it should be replanted outside." After a few weeks in a warm house, the tree will sprout new buds. If it is

planted outside in the cold weather, the drastic temperature change will kill the tree.

Heritage Acres, a wholesale farm owned by Ed and Nancy Campbell, is located in Lightstreet on a hill behind the Heritage House Restaurant. Ed Campbell has been in business since 1961; his son, Jim, has been involved since 1986. The farm has about 250,000

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trees, planting 22,000 trees annually and harvesting about 20,000.

"All trees are hand-planted on our farm," says Jim Campbell. "This allows for faster growth in their first two years, while lowering the amount of trees lost." Compared to machine planting, hand planting is more costly and requires more labor hours, but it has proven to be more efficient for the farm. Heritage Acres no longer sells "choose and cut" trees.

Abraczinskas Nurseries, a large wholesale farm in Catawissa, specializes in B&B trees, cut trees, transplants, and seedlings and ships to many states. Abraczinskas has been growing trees for 85 years and grows several varieties of fir, pine, and spruce.

In the 1930s, Andrew Abraczinskas developed and taught the techniques of tree shearing to growers all over the East Coast. His son, Anthony "Duke" Abraczinskas, planted more than 100 acres of Douglas Fir in 1950, with the idea to market the new Christmas tree in the Eastern U.S. With his sons,

Anthony "Duke" Jr., Donald, Jerome, and Eugene, the corporation expanded to over 2,000 acres. The farm began growing its own seedlings and transplants. Today, Abraczinskas Nurseries is operated by five of Andrew's great-grandchildren. The company is presently growing five million trees with over 3,000 acres in production.

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# HISTORY REVERED

## *Owners of a Historic Home in Bloomsburg Uphold the Past*

by Elisabeth Erickson



Stepping outside her apartment across the street from Saint Matthew's Lutheran Church, Joanne Erwine was surprised to see her landlady. After chatting for awhile, the woman gave her the news that "the old woman at the top of the hill passed away." The home at 75 North Market Street was for sale.

The Erwines had only been married a year and a half when they heard the news, and "being in the right place at the right time" allowed the newlyweds to gain ownership of the "stately-looking house," says Joanne.

"Stately" may be the best way to describe the home that was first owned by Judge Warren J. Woodward, the first elected judge of the 26th judicial district, who bought a large plot of land in 1856, upon where he built the home.

The home was built in the Federal-Greek Revival architectural style. "Americans associate classic democratic principles with Greece," says Dr. Thomas Walters, associate professor of art at Bloomsburg

University. It is notable that the very first elected judge of the area used this style when building his home.

The term "federal" refers to the period of 1790-1820 during which architecture showed a reverence to the grandiose Roman style. Although Woodward didn't build his home until after 1856, Dr. Walters says "the double chimneys reflect the influence of this style."

The mixture of both the Federal and Greek Revival styles makes the Woodward House the only one of its type in Bloomsburg.

Since 1856, the house has been sold five times. "We couldn't move in the way it was," says Mrs.



Turning this door knob leads to a first floor front porch that overlooks Bloomsburg's town square.

*Spectrum*

Erwine, "It hadn't been painted in 30 years." The Erwines steamed off seven layers of wallpaper, replaced the roof, and put in a new kitchen. The previous owner, Mary Schoch McKelvy, was an invalid, and only occupied the second floor. The kitchen downstairs needed repairs and remodeling because of neglect.

The first floor is intricate hardwood parquet, each panel laid by hand. The original oak staircase stretches from the first to third floor, spanning the entire home. Ceilings are about 11 feet high, three feet higher than today's ceilings. Of the five fireplaces, only two are in working order. Some of the original toilets, light switches, and doorknobs remain, as well as radiator heating. In addition, the molding on the walls



Five fireplaces warmed the Woodward house; the Erwines put in the dental-style molding and the molding outlining the ceiling.

— photos by Robert Brown

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of the living room is believed by the Erwines to be original.

The lot contains the home, the remnants of a barn, and a garage, originally an old carriage house. The gardener of previous residents lived in this building.

The old icehouse still stands. Adjacent to the icehouse is what appears to be the remains of a root cellar, or perhaps a storage area for canned goods.

The back porch has an opening at either end, through which a dirt road used to run. Hooks on the ceiling in the middle of the porch are believed to have been used to tether horses.

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# Capturing the Thunder

*"A lot more can happen on the road than just taking pictures."*

*—Reuben Brouse*

**I**t's speeding toward you. You stand your ground. Waiting. Just waiting. Click!

It thunders by, and you jump back into your car and race to beat it to the next vantage point so you can take another photograph.

You're chasing a train.

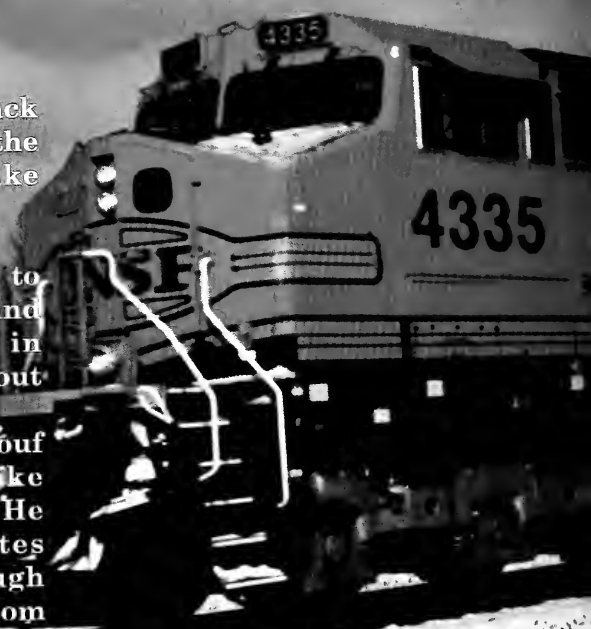
To some, railfanning is a hobby; to others, it's a way of life. To Ron and Marsha Kouf, Watsontown, both in their late 20s, chasing trains is about capturing and preserving history.

"We're both history buffs," Ron Kouf says. "Taking photographs is like saving a small piece of history." He

and Marsha have a collection of photographs that illustrates Brothers' circus train ramp through town and a piece of equipment from one of the rides was hanging out the side.

"It ripped off the old Pennsylvania Railroad signal post," he says. "The old signal post was a wooden post with a style that was 10 feet high and had a lot of history."

Another memorable one was a photograph of a train passing through a tunnel. "It was a very interesting sight," he says. "The train was coming out of the tunnel and the smoke was coming out of the tunnel."



Sperry Rail  
service  
inspection  
car near  
Watson town.  
Lights are from  
a nearby coal  
train.



*Photo by Ronald Kouf II*



*"Pumpkin" near Montandon  
— Photo by Jeff Brouse*



*Photo by Ronald Kouf II*

and "by the time it got there it was dark, so we didn't get any good pictures."

Capturing history is something Reuben Brouse, Lewisburg, has accomplished in his 36 years of railfanning. He says he's seen many changes in the rail scene.

"Things change over the years," he says, "the small roads are always being bought out by the bigger railroads."

Brouse, who has a collection of 100,000 slides, has been to the New England states, British Columbia, California, and New York to meet other railfans, sharing experiences and trading slides.

Although taking pictures is a big part of the railfanning adventure, some railfans like to go along for the ride.

For Marsha Kouf, railfanning is "the thrill of the chase" and the "adrenaline rush" she experiences during their adventures. She finds it challenging to arrive at the next location before the train.

"The train may be going 50 miles per hour through town," Kouf says, "and you get stuck behind a slow car or at a red light."

During each chase, Kouf collects information about camera settings, engine identification and car counts, keeping accurate records by using railroad reference books, frequency maps, and

international listing guidebooks.

She says her job is "mostly secretarial." But, she also says, "it's always good to have an extra set of eyes on the road during the chase."

Kouf says some of their friends have gotten speeding tickets during a chase, but that has never happened to her. "Speeding is definitely out," she says.

For greater accuracy and preservation, Ron Kouf also uses a video camera.

"You can see and feel the power of a train with a video," he says. "It's nice to capture the motion and the sound of the train, and it's good to complement your slide collection with a video."

The Koufs "feel" the power, because they live next to the tracks. They can see the signal lights and hear the warning horn of approaching trains, sometimes distinguishing which train is coming by the sound of its horn.

Although the Koufs have chased several types of trains, their favorite is the orange Burlington Northern Santa Fe engine, affectionately called "pumpkin" by railfans. For Marsha Kouf, the ultimate experience was a ride on a pumpkin.

"It was dumb luck," she says. "I was on my way to the dentist when I spotted a pumpkin sitting on the tracks. I ran up the dike to get a picture and the engineer called

out 'Hey, you want a ride?' "It was incredible, so exciting," she says. Kouf says the best part came when they spotted her husband along the tracks taking pictures.

"He didn't know I was on the train," she says. "I was supposed to be at the dentist's. He was so jealous."

At the other end of town from the Koufs' residence lives Krissy Mott, whose fiance, Chris Marks, is helping her learn the ins-and-outs of railfanning.

She says Marks teases her about the 20 rolls of film in her refrigerator she hasn't found time or money to develop. "Life gets in the way of hobbies," she explains.

Marks has been a railfan since 1989 and says he's "hopelessly addicted" to every aspect of railfanning.

Marks first started taking photographs to authenticate the model trains he was building.

Several thousand color slides later he has finished 150 engines and 700 cars, and his photographs have been published in *Railpace* magazine.

"To be published, your photographs must have distinguishing features and landmarks," Marks says. "Things like mile markers, signal lights and train stations—anything that can show the reader where the photograph was taken." Vantage points are important, but alertness and safety are



Train derailment near Watsonstown brickyard.

—Photo by  
Chris Marks

top priorities when railfanning, Marks says. A dragging chain or strap from a lumber car or a derailment can be deadly when you're standing near the tracks.

Marks knows from his own experience how suddenly accidents happen. In 1994 he and a friend were near the Watsontown Brickyard and heard a tremendous noise. "All of a sudden the Conrail ML 411 came slamming to a halt," Marks says. "You could hear the squealing of steel and then BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The train broke in half and some of the cars fell off the track."

The engineer had hit the brakes to avoid hitting a child who had fallen off his bicycle along the tracks. "When you see something that big come to a grinding halt, you know something has happened," says Marks. "It was amazing that no one was hurt in the accident."

"A lot more can happen on the road than just taking

pictures," Reuben Brouse says.

"Sometimes you can end up with bonuses." He recalls two occasions when he was chasing a train through the mountains and got more than just a train photograph. "I came around the corner doing about 50 miles per hour, says Brouse. "There in the middle of the road stood a big elk with a huge rack. I

slammed on the brakes and the elk casually walked away."

Another time a bear waded across the creek toward them.

"Someone got excited and started yelling; the bear ran onto the road



Marsha Kouf in the cab of a "pumpkin"

and was clipped in the rear end by a motorcycle. He took off up the side of the mountain—I think the bear was more afraid of us than we were of him."

Brouse's son, Jeff, Danville,



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Photo by Chris Marks

First CP freight train in Riverside on the refurbished Delaware and Hudson line between Sunbury, Pa., and Birmingham, N.Y.



Photo by MaryAnne Reins

Jeff Brouse tells his three-year-old son, Tom, about the "Whistle board" and "mile marker" from an abandoned rail line in their collection. Below: Jeff, at the age of nine, was already watching trains; this one was off Route 42 near Bloomsburg.



Photo by Reuben Brouse

often walks abandoned rail lines searching for artifacts left behind when the tracks were torn up.

In his front yard is a five-foot high iron whistle board stamped with a "W" used to let engineers know when to start blowing the horn when approaching a railroad crossing. At the corner of his house is a four-foot high railroad mile marker displaying his address.

"It's a nice relaxing thing that has to do with trains without chasing them," he says of his hunt for abandoned treasure.

But don't think Brouse doesn't like the chase. He's a third generation railfan and has spent most of his life around trains, taking his first train ride when he was four years old. His grandfather spent his life working for the Pennsylvania Railroad, his uncle is a yardmaster for Northfork Southern, and his father used to help out as a brakeman on a tourist train.

Keeping the family tradition is important to him and he continues it by taking his wife and two young sons to see the trains.

"It's a piece of me and I feel like I'm keeping the tradition alive,"

Brouse says. "If it's in your blood, it's in your life. Different people connect with it in different ways."

Railfanning takes patience. Knowing the best locations to take photographs can be time consuming and frustrating. Being at the right place at the right time is what railfanning is all about.

"Once we drove up the line to meet a train," Ron Kouf says, "and didn't see it until we drove 300 miles and got to Buffalo."

Knowing the loca-  
*Spectrum*

tions of trains is a challenging endeavor, so railfans use scanners, interpret signal lights and, most of all, rely on each other for information about the trains.

"You talk to people and get train schedules," Reuben Brouse says. "You have to know when trains are running and some states have railroad maps to help find them."

Arlen Lenker, a Northumberland train yard car repairman and a railfan himself, provides train schedules and information to local railfans to aid in their chase.

Lenker was a railfan long before he became a railroad worker and attributes his love of railroads on the circumstance of his birth.

"I was born in a railroader's house," he explains. He says he started chasing trains in the 1960s when the Reading Railroad ran steam engine excursions through Sunbury. He later got a job with Conrail. Lenker actually rode a steam engine during a trip to Colorado and calls the steam engine his favorite type of train.

"Most steam engines today are tourist trains," he says. "Union Pacific is the only railroad left that uses steam engines."

The next time you stop at a railroad crossing to wait for a train, instead of counting cars, look around and you might see a railfan in action.



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### Sample Chart

*\$50,000 One-Life Charitable Remainder Unitrust funded at age 72*

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\$75,000	\$50,000	5%	\$43,780	\$3,750
\$50,000	\$50,000	6%	\$26,495	\$3,000
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# Flight 800

## A Quest for the Truth

by Donald Nibert

**I**n November 1998, the ABC-TV Network cancelled an Oliver Stone production, "TWA Flight 800," which was to be one of four segments in the pilot episode of "Declassified." "Declassified" was a proposed new TV series that was to cover alleged government cover-ups. Actually, not only was the segment cancelled, but the whole series.

*Dan's Papers*, of Bridgehampton, N.Y., 30 miles from the center of the recovery operations, reported that ABC's executives stated that family members of the victims objected to the segment. Reporter Jerry Cimisi was told that four letters were sent—three letters from families who lost loved ones in TWA Flight 800 and one from a person who lost a daughter in the Pan Am Flight 103 crash at

Lockerbee, Scotland.

I find it difficult to believe that ABC cancelled a program after spending \$750,000 to \$1 million as a result of receiving four or more letters. If this is the true reason, I must commend the network for its sensitive and humanistic approach to news coverage. It is indeed a positive change rarely observed in today's mainline news media.

But, did other forces, possibly FBI or White House intervention, influence this decision? Did the FBI once again use family members of the victims as pawns in an effort to eliminate criticism of the investigation?

I thoroughly understand the objections of some families involved in this tragedy and in no way wish to state or imply any criticism. My wife was also very



uncomfortable with the possible use for entertainment purposes an event, which caused the death of our own beautiful 16-year-old daughter. News releases about the cancellation emphasized that the production was under the direction of ABC's Entertainment Division, not the News Division.

Although I am aware of the additional grief that this segment could cause, I was willing to accept the pain if it might lead to the truth. No additional pain caused by this program can compare to that which we all have already endured. There exist too many discrepancies, which



—Photo by Donald Nibert

Reconstruction  
of the airplane  
at the Calverton,  
N.Y. hanger.



All photos copyright 2000 by Donald Nibert

was what the segment was all about, to blindly accept the FBI's and National Transportation Safety Board's conclusion that the center wing tank was the initiating event that caused the destruction of the airplane. After viewing the reconstruction of the airplane, there can be no doubt that the center fuel tank exploded, but what was the cause? Was it a secondary explosion caused by a bright object seen streaking towards the airplane by hundreds of eyewitnesses?

Did ABC simply acquiesce to pressure from the federal government? The *Seattle Times* reported that Oliver Stone said, "I think ABC just folded to pressure. But it was so abrupt, considering they knew what we were doing for six months." Furthermore, *Dan's Papers* stated that ABC News Division executives were unaware of the project being produced by the Entertainment Division until informed by employees of the federal government.

Kelly O'Meara, assistant producer of the "TWA Flight 800" segment, said the network had filmed 30 hours of tape, had not

finished, and had just started with the eyewitness accounts.

"We had not written the script. The episode was not about a missile, terrorist attack, or friendly fire," O'Meara said. "It was about the numerous anomalies associated with the FBI's and NTSB's investigations." She also said, "The word 'missile' was not going to be used. It was cancelled because ABC knew what they had."

As a result of my family's direct involvement, I have closely followed the investigation. I believe that a cover-up exists and leads directly to the White House. Remember this accident occurred 3-1/2 months prior to the presidential election. Was the alleged cover-up initiated so that the accident would have no effect on the outcome of the election? In an early status report to victims' families, James Kallstrom, FBI assistant director in charge of the investigation, complained that the original radar tapes from JFK

International Airport were first sent to the White House, not to the FBI. Actually, if the proper procedure was followed, the tapes should have been sent to

the NTSB. What did the tapes contain that caused such unexplained deviations from normal procedures? There are a great number of discrepancies associated with this tragedy. Some of these may have been explored in the 15-minute segment. A few are as follows:

1. Tom Shoemaker, an independent researcher, states on



'Angel' memorial to the 21 Montoursville victims of Flight 800.

his web site that strong evidence exists that the Navy was conducting classified offshore war maneuvers, "Global Yankee '96," near the crash site at the time of the explosion. Soon after the accident the Navy stated that the closest assist, the USS Normandy, was 185 miles away off the coast of Virginia. Eight months later the Navy acknowledged that three submarines were in the area. Kelly O'Meara, now with *Insight Magazine*, reported that the NTSB released expanded radar data which indicates that a large concentration of ships (24-30) were moving in formation into an activated military warning area, W-105, at the time of the explosion. The ships were within 18 nautical miles of the crash site.

2. President Clinton signed Presidential Executive Order 13039 on March 12, 1997, which removed the Naval Special Warfare Development Group from the Federal Labor-Management Relations Program. As a result of this order "whistle blower" protection for the Naval units involved in the recovery operations was removed. If a Navy Seal released sensitive information, he or she could be prosecuted with probably the same enthusiasm as James and Liz Sanders were prosecuted when they were involved in the removal and analysis of foam samples for missile exhaust residue taken from passenger seats.

3. According to retired Navy Cmdr. William Donaldson III, the U.S. Military was in a high state of alert, the highest since the Cuban missile crisis.

4. In the early morning hours of July 18, 1996, CNN aired a film clip of a radar track of a high-speed projectile inter-

cepting the airplane just before the explosion. The film clip was shown once then removed. When I asked John Clark, NTSB, about this film clip at the NTSB Hearing in Baltimore, Md., he stated "the anomaly was not present on the original radar tapes the FBI recieved from the White House."

5. Many eyewitnesses reported seeing a missile ascend to the airplane, including retired Maj. Fredrick Meyer, a pilot in the air at the time of the explosion. He had observed numerous missiles during his tour of duty in the Vietnam War. He told me that he saw a red streak within the exhaust which is characteristic of a Russian SAM 6 missile. The red streak was used to visually direct this type of missile to its intended target. I have met this man who is an attorney with a successful law

practice. Although he seemed credible to me, the FBI failed to take a written statement from him.

6. Phillip Weiss of the *New York Observer* reported that an unidentified radar track was recorded leaving the immediate area of the crash site at a speed of 30-35 knots. I can not comprehend any situation that would cause a vessel to leave the site of such a tragic accident without first trying to render assistance—unless it was directly involved. Was it a Navy ship?

7. It has been reported that malfunctions may have occurred with two satellites that had coverage of the crash site at the time of the explosion. Apparently GOES #7 failed to transmit an image at 8 p.m. on July 17. Purdue University reportedly has an excellent archive of satellite images. I have been unable to locate this

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archive and verify the missing image. Satellite F13 also has four missing images covering the eastern coast at this time.

8. *The Southampton Press*, a local newspaper, reported that on May 13, 1997, Dede Muma mistakenly received a fax from Teledyne Ryan Aeronautical, which was sent to the Calverton, Long Island, office of the FBI. Her fax number was 369-4310; the FBI's fax number was 369-4301. The fax showed a diagram of the tail section of a Teledyne Ryan BQM-34 Firebee I missile. A part from such a missile was recovered among the wreckage of TWA Flight 800. Such drones are used as targets. This information would never have been known had it not been mistakenly sent to a wrong fax number. How long had the part been submerged? Was the part recovered in the general area or within the wreckage?

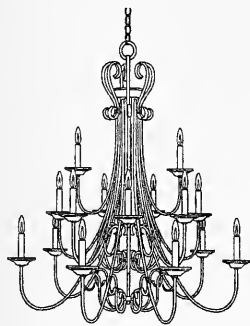
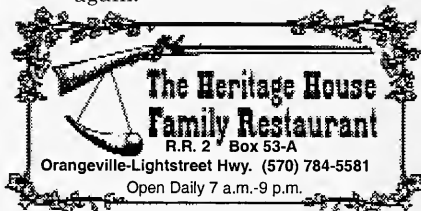
9. Early in the investigation it became apparent that those who questioned the official explanation would be blatantly attacked and their character assassinated. They were told that their speculations were causing additional grief for the families who had already suffered greatly; therefore, questions should not be raised.

10. At the NTSB hearings, James Kalstrom addressed the family members of the victims in a private meeting. He stated 700 fishing boats were impounded and the decks examined for exhaust residue. Nothing was found. Local residents have stated that this did not occur. Kalstrom was asked if he planned to stay with the investigation. He said he would. His resignation was announced on the evening news that same day.

I base my belief that friendly fire was involved on not just one of these items, but on their to-

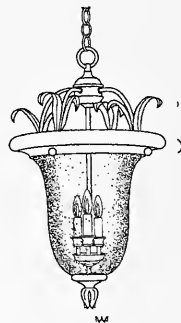
tality. "Declassified" was going to cover some of these anomalies. We need to be made aware of a possible cover-up, and errors in judgement made by our government need to be exposed, so that they will not happen again. If what I believe is true, why would our government allow the testing of secret Star Wars technology or anti-missile missiles so close to a major air traffic corridor and place innocent passengers in harms way?

The truth will not change the damage already done to so many, but a Congressional intervention may put an end to speculation and allow closure to occur. The truth may set us free. Maybe, I would be able to sleep again.



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# A CONVERSATION WITH . . .

# Donald Nibert

**MaryJayne Reibsome:** Where did you find your information in your search for the truth?

**Donald Nibert:** I talked to reporters, personal contacts, and found a lot of information on the Internet. You have to be careful with what is on the Internet; anyone can post information whether it's the truth or not. I also talked to eyewitnesses. What upset me at the National Transportation Safety Board hearing in Baltimore was that they considered lightning, a meteorite, and a gas bubble as possible reasons for the crash. But they would not consider eyewitness accounts of something rising from the horizon. We're not talking about two or three people here. There were a large number of eyewitnesses.

**Q.** Retired U.S. Navy Cdr. William S. Donaldson stated on his web site that he appeared before the House Aviation Subcommittee on May 6, 1999, and showed proof that points to a cover up. If Cdr. Donaldson could not influence the Subcommittee, what makes you think you could possibly make a difference?

**A.** There's no guarantee. But it's something that I feel compelled to do. I failed to protect my daughter and that is one of the duties I have always taken seriously. The least I can do, if I can do anything, is to try to find out the complete story.

**Q.** Besides the Sanders, whose reputations were attacked when they questioned the official explanation?

**A.** Pierre Salinger. He was White House press secretary during the Kennedy administration and was also a former correspondent for ABC. He was in France when he released information that the Navy was involved, I think he had a radar clip or some other type of information. Richard Russell, a former United Airlines employee, had a video that was seized by the FBI.

**Q.** How many times did you visit the hanger in Calverton and what did you do there?

**A.** We went five times and were allowed to take pictures, but we were told we were being moni-

tored. At one point they were going to take pictures of the belongings of the victims, but we said that we wanted to see things, look at things directly. We and four or five other families sent letters and after the pressure they decided to put things out. We went up on a weekend and laid things out under their direction. We wanted to help arrange everything so we could find anything of our daughter's.

**Q.** Let's talk about the first photograph. The one of the left side of the plane. What made you think that this could be an exit hole?

**A.** It's bent over, you can see where it's curled up, and I describe it as when you shoot through a tin can. It looks like the exit hole of the bullet going through the other side of the tin can. That's not proof, I'm not saying it's proof, but this brings up questions. CNN had a photograph that showed a different size of hole. It was much larger. I took a photograph a year before this and pieces were missing.

**Q.** Do you think they removed parts of the plane and later put them back on?

**A.** Yes. And that could be possibly for analysis purposes. We have to keep that in mind.

**Q.** What about the second photograph? The right side of the plane?

**A.** Seems to be more destruction on that side and it would be difficult to pick out an entrance or exit hole on that side. That is the side where the center fuel tank exploded.

**Q.** James Sanders, in *The Downing of TWA Flight 800*, states that fuel residue was deposited on the seats in rows 17, 18, and 19. Is the alleged exit hole anywhere near this location?

**A.** The hole is on the other side of the airplane in rows 11 and 12.

**Q.** What do you think really happened?

**A.** There are two scenarios. One is—and this is what Cdr. Donaldson is saying—it was a terrorist attack. But I think that our military has developed

an anti-missile to take down something like our cruise missiles in case something like that was sent against us. They have tested something like that in Hawaii. There's more than one missile involved. I think both of them hit the 747 during testing. I think it was an accident.

**Q.** Why do you think the government would try to cover it up?

**A.** One reason would be the effect it would have on our military and the funding toward our military. The second reason was it was 3-1/2 months before the presidential election and that would have an effect on the election.

**Q.** Let's turn now to another side of this tragedy. Let's talk about you. You were a delegate to Oklahoma City after the bombing and also appeared on "Freedom Speaks" in a half-hour segment called "Negative Images." Public Broadcasting Stations aired this show in this country and in Europe. What was your objective in making these public appearances?

**A.** I wanted to bring to light the insensitivity that our news media have in covering major tragedies.

**Q.** What happened to make you speak out against the media?

**A.** The repeated telephone calls. You can be nice to one or two, but after 10 or 20 I got very angry at the disrespect that was shown to our family and other families. At the memorial services at the high school we had to slip into the back door to keep away from reporters. It was the same way at some of the funeral services too. There was also one instance when Donna and I were selecting a burial site for our daughter at a local cemetery. Our picture was taken without our knowledge by David Rentas, a reporter from the *Washington Post*, and printed on page 3 with a related story by Steve Dunleavy.

**Q.** Did you talk to either of these men?

**A.** No. We were on posted, private ground. I felt that it was an invasion of privacy and of no news value. It was the last thing we ever wanted to do, as parents, to select a burial spot. If I had been aware that this photographer had done this, I would have ripped his throat out on the spot. I would have done it. And the reason for that was I considered that I had been a failure in protecting our daughter and that lay heavy on my heart. And there was my wife in tears and I had failed to protect her in another situation.

**Q.** What about your trips to New York? How did

**'When you went outside, the media would just swarm'**

**--Donald Nibert**



the media there treat you?

**A.** You had to fight your way through a gauntlet, especially at the Ramada Inn near JFK. It felt like you were being held hostage inside. When you went outside, the media would just swarm. Once, Donna was sitting outside on a bench and a reporter crawled under a bus to film her. We also had badges to identify us so we could go in and out of the hotel. One reporter had gotten a duplicate badge and went into the private briefings that were for family members. My wife noticed her taking notes, and the police arrested her.

**Q.** Do you feel your speaking out had any effect on the media's sensitivity to victims' families?

**A.** It had maybe a 6-month effect. Look at what they did at Colombine. They were all over that. What got me was the way they wanted to come in and take pictures at the funerals. To me that was disrespectful.

**Q.** What about other families who lost loved ones in the crash? Are they supportive in your quest to find answers?

**A.** No. It's much easier to accept mechanical malfunction for the reason for the crash, because what we make always breaks. And other people cannot apprehend the possibility that our government would lie to us.

**Q.** Do you think you will be able stop searching for answers?

**A.** I hope so. I haven't been able to do so in three years. Just writing about it helps. The mere expressing what I feel and putting it down has a beneficial effect.

**Q.** What was the official explanation for the crash?

**A.** To my knowledge, it is still pending.



**S**tep into Dana Ramsey's dining room for a Christmas feast and get a taste of tradition dating back 200 years. String beans, savory, thyme, and cayenne hang drying from the ceiling beams. The smell of wood smoke mingles with the aroma of roasted duck, sweet potato pie, and corn chowder bubbling over an open hearth.

"Every year our family eats the traditional Christmas dinner, and everything is prepared on the hearth," Ramsey says. "We feast together and celebrate kinship with loved ones to bring back the tradition and to keep from getting caught up in the commercialism of Christmas."

She and her husband, David, along with their six children, live in Northumberland in a house built in 1846. The house was originally a lock house for the canal, and used as a boarding house for the canal workers.

Ramsey, whose Indian name is

**by MaryJayne Reibsome**

Ladyhawk, was raised in the Blackfoot tradition. "By reliving history you can see what your personal lineage was like," she says, pointing out, "Cooking on an open hearth is fun, but you can also learn from it."

Everyone can enjoy hearth cooking, Ramsey says, and not having a fireplace in your home is not a problem.

"You can build a fire in your backyard," she says. "Everything you can do in a conventional oven, you can do in a Dutch oven."

A Dutch oven is a pot with three legs to keep it above the coals, with a lid that has a lip to hold the hot coals that get piled on top. Ramsey says the secret to open hearth cooking is the "coals must be red hot to bake the food." She also advises, "a good hot fire must burn for at least two hours before you're ready."

For roasting meats, such as tur-

key and duck, Ramsey uses a hand-crafted reflector tin oven.

"The oven has a door for basting and the meat must be turned on a skewer every 15 minutes," Ramsey says. "The secret to cooking with a reflection oven," she says, "is that it must be kept clean for the reflective surface to work."

Other tools used in the hearth include a three-legged trivet to keep foods warm, a crane built into the fireplace that moves to allow easy removal of hot hanging pots, S-hooks to adjust levels of your pots above the coals, a poker and shovel for stirring and removing coals, and a brazier with a grate for keeping a coffee pot warm.

Ramsey accents her home with decorations reminiscent of the past. "Mistletoe, holly, apples, clove studded oranges, and evergreens were used for trimming," she says.

Pineapple, she says, was considered to be the favored centerpiece and a symbol of friendship.



## Pumpkin, Squash, or Sweet Potato Pie

1 ½ cups mashed cooked pumpkin, squash, or sweet potato (you may substitute one can for fresh)

\* tsp. salt

\* tsp. ginger

1 tsp. cinnamon

\* tsp. cloves

3 eggs

1 cup sugar

Beat all together. Pour into pie shell. Bake in a preheated Dutch Oven on high heat for 45-50 minutes. It is done when a silver knife inserted 1 inch from side of filling comes out clean. Center may look soft but will set later.

\*Or bake in a conventional over at 425°

## Pastry

2 cups flour

2/3-cup lard

pinch salt

6 tbsp. cold water

Mix flour and salt then add lard and water all at once. Stir with fork until mixed. Roll out very thin. Makes two nine-inch crusts.

## Roast Duck

1 4-5 pound duck

Stuff duck with sliced apples, raisins and currants. Secure the bird on skewers and place in reflector oven. Turn and baste every 15 minutes. Modern method: Bake in a conventional over at 325° F, 20 minutes per pound.



Winter 2000



## Sweet potatoes and apples

6 medium sweet potatoes

4 tbsp. butter

\* cup brown sugar

\* tsp. salt

1 \* cups sliced apples

1 tsp. cinnamon

Boil potatoes until tender. Skin.

Slice in ½ inch pieces. Layer with apples in butter dish.

Sprinkle with sugar and spices.

Dot with butter. Repeat to top of dish – last, layer apples.

Bake in preheated Dutch Oven – moderate heat for 45 minutes.

\*Conventional oven 350° - 45 minutes.

## Ladyhawk's Spiced Cider or Mulled Wine

1 tbsp. cloves

4 sticks cinnamon – chopped

2 tbsp. allspice

1 tbsp. dried orange

\* or 1 anise star

1-gallon apple cider\*

\*Use 100% apple cider no preservatives

Place all ingredients in a muslin bag, tie shut, and drop into apple cider in an enamel pot or kettle. Bring to boil and then simmer for 10 minutes. You may also substitutive red wine for the apple cider.

## Corn Chowder

1/2 pound ham cubes

1 onion, sliced

1 quart water

3 potatoes, sliced or diced

2 cups corn, fresh or frozen

6 common crackers, unsalted (soaked in water)

1 cup hot milk

2 tlbs. butter

1/4 tsp. pepper

Freshly ground thyme

(several sprigs fresh or 1/2 tsp, dried)

Brown ham in large pot. Add sliced onions and cook till translucent. Add quart of water and cook on low heat. Add potatoes and corn and cook for 30 minutes. Add crackers, milk, butter, pepper, and thyme, and cook for additional 15 minutes.



# OUIJA BOARDS

## THE RISKS OF PLAYING

Despite the dangers, people continue to experiment with Ouija boards.

Bloomsburg University student Jessica Cowan says she no longer felt safe in her dorm room after experimenting with her Ouija board.

"I had to perform an exorcism in my room after I used the board," Cowan says. "Things were being moved around in my room, objects were knocked over."

Following a priest's instructions, she sprinkled holy water on herself, burnt incense, and sprinkled salt in each corner of the room, while reciting prayers and chants. After performing the exorcism, things in her room went back to normal, Cowan said.

"It was necessary for my mental health," Cowan says.

Another Bloomsburg University student, Kristal Markle, had never given much creditability to the Ouija board, but her opinion changed.

"There is definitely a pres-

ence and it's very powerful," Markle says.

"The board wouldn't let me not believe in it. It came to the point if we had moved our fingers off the board it would have kept moving."

Some people question how a mass-produced game can have supernatural powers. However, the Ouija has a history that dates further back than its 1967 patent from Parker Brothers. The Greek philosopher Pythagorus used a mechanism comparable to the Ouija board about 500 BC.

The mystery of the board is the mover of the planchette, the name for the heart-shaped pointer. Dee Ann Wymer, an anthropology professor at Bloomsburg University, says most people give too much credit to the supernatural without questioning any other possibilities.

She explains a possible reason why Ouija seems to work.

"When a caller is the person you were thinking of, you automatically want to give them credit for having ESP," says Wymer. "Nevertheless, if you made a list of all the times you were thinking of someone and the telephone did not ring, that list would be a lot longer,"

Wymer says.

If you believe in the unbelievable, then "you are already accepting the supernatural before even using the board," Wymer says.

"It's been proven to be involuntary muscle movements," she says. "It's either people fooling themselves, which is easy to do, or someone else fooling you."

Sue Yarns, owner of Into the Light, Bloomsburg, does not sell Ouija boards in her shop.

"People don't know how to prepare themselves for what they are about to do," Yarns says. "They see things they don't want to. I end up having to straighten out their energy afterwards."

According to Rev. Lawrence McNeil, of St. Columbia Church, Bloomsburg, Ouija boards can cause harm because people start to use them as a crutch.

"Eventually, anything you start to use as a crutch will take away your power and control," he says.

"The greatest gift God gave to us is freedom," says McNeil, "God wants us to take responsibility for our lives, not give control over to the lines in our hands, or the stars or a Ouija board."

~ JENNIFER NEUMER

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